

"THE STORY OF OUR LIVES FROM YEAR TO YEAR."

ALL THE YEAR ROUND

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By ESMÈ STUART.

Author of "A Faire Damsell," "Joan Vellacot," "Kestell of Greystone," etc. etc.

CHAPTER LVI. A COUNTERPART.

NAN EVANS had to remind herself that children are not always like their parents before she could force herself to interview Austin in person. Of course, since her return home Grace had often mentioned Mr. Gordon, and Sibyl was fond of recounting anecdotes of Mr. Jones and his tutor, so that, like the sisters, Nan took it for granted that no connection existed between that Mr. Gordon and the Warren.

She, moreover, strongly suspected that Grace was not quite heart-whole, and one day she tested her idea.

"I fancy, child, that Mr. Gordon must have had some reason for being so very kind to you both."

Grace blushed; she was too truthful to deny.

"Yes, I think he had; but you know, Nan, it can never be."

"I don't know any such thing. However, we may as well wait till he comes again; if he is worth anything I think he will."

Grace, too, sometimes wondered if he would ever care to come again and ask her the same question; but surely that was impossible. She had been too certain, too determined with her "No," to make it probable. Though she was contented with her present life—contented chiefly because she was with Nan, and because

Sibyl was sheltered—she yet began to look back on her German life as a sweet experience. She often thought of that happy time when he had cared for her without her knowing it, and that other time when, though she had repelled him, she all the time longed to fly to him for love and happiness, and longed to give him the wealth of her woman's heart.

Where was he now? How would he find out where she was? Would he ask the Professorin? Grace had her own treasures, which were very sacred to her. That note he had written to her, how precious it was, how she loved it; how often she read it when she was alone!

As for Sibyl, she was gradually getting back her health, but she would never be the spoilt child she had been. She was a woman now, and a woman saddened somewhat by the folly which had nearly ruined her; but Nan was very gentle with her; she never alluded to the past, never reproached her with it.

It was in the midst of this quiet household that Austin suddenly made his appearance in the way related; and it was only when she read the card that the truth burst upon Nan.

When he was gone she tried to compose herself. She felt that nothing would ever allow her to let Grace marry the son of that woman; besides, he was ignorant who Grace really was, and when he did know, there was no likelihood of his going on with the courtship. Nan was a decided person, and she settled instantly that Mr. Gordon should be forbidden the house once for all, that her child should not have the sorrow of seeing him again, or of being led into further trouble through him. If he wrote she would not let Grace read the letter.

Grace found her still standing with the card in her hand when she came into the room.

"Who was it wanted to see you, Nan?" asked Grace, innocently, though she often asked the question, hoping that other name would be said, and to-day it was said.

"It was Mr. Austin Gordon, Grace, the gentleman you told me about whom you knew in Germany."

"Was it?" Grace sat down trembling a little. "Did he ask after me? Didn't he wish to see me? Oh, Nan, he was so good to us; I can never forget it."

"But you must, Grace, my child—see," and she handed Grace the card.

"The Warrep." The words floated before her; then they danced up and down as if written in fiery characters; and then Grace knew that Nan was beside her, saying:

"Grace, you must forget him, you must; he is that woman's son."

"And I never guessed it. Yes, yes, I must forget him; and if he knew—Nan, I must tell him. He will think I have deceived him; he will——"

"What does it matter what he thinks? When he knows he will think no more of you. Oh, Grace, my darling, who could have guessed that such a thing would have happened? My poor dear, try and be brave."

But Grace rejected even Nan's comfort. She had a hard, hard victory to win, and she must fight it out by herself, and no one must know what it cost her. Henceforth all her pleasant memories were but as gall to her; all the love she had given she felt had been given in vain. "When he knows"—so thought Grace—"he will give me up, give up caring for me, give up even the thought of me which he said would always be with him."

Why was Heaven so hard to her? Why was her life to be all cheerless, loveless, because—her father had been a bad man? The sins of the fathers visited upon the children is a very terrible judgement when it overtakes the children and they see that it has overtaken them.

Now and then Grace said: "I will conquer the grief; I will root it out," and then she found herself floating back in fancy to the German wood and the shady spot where he had said such kind words; or worse still to the deserted avenue in the gardens, where he had offered her all he had to give. Such struggles and such victories

are of daily occurrence; every day in some spot a human heart is breaking because of the same old, old story of lost love, the only love which it considers to be of supreme value, above all other love, and which in some mad moments that being would almost barter life to enjoy, if only for a few moments.

This was the first real trouble in the new home; but Grace was so good, so brave, that she was anxious to hide it from her loving Nan and from little Sibyl; but Sibyl was far more thoughtful and far more observant now than in past days. She had gone through a school of bitter adversity, and she knew its secret signs.

Then Sibyl questioned Nan, and Nan, who was too honest and too blunt to keep a secret that was not really important, soon blurted it out.

"That man, Sibyl, is the son of the woman who let you go out unprotected into that cruel world."

She paused, and Sibyl blushed as she said, thinking of many things:

"Do you really mean, Nan, that Austin Gordon is her son? And we saw so much of him at Unterberg. I never did like him as much as Grace did, and now I know why. Yes, I think I had an instinct. How could he dare to come and seek us out again?"

"He did not know who you were; but I dare say he will soon find it out, and then he will not trouble us again with his presence."

Then that morning Nan, taking up the paper, read the announcement of the marriage of Miss Beatrice Gordon and Captain Colin Grant. Even the name of the church was mentioned, where Nan had, in former days, half hoped she might see her own children married. Then the stern woman threw away the paper, feeling how unjust the world could be, little knowing that there was more peace in her own home than among the wedding party at the Warren.

Others were in their home now, and the bright family party about which Austin had spoken to Grace were enjoying all that which had once been theirs. Grace hid away the paper from Sibyl, she did not want to rouse once more her angry feelings; and so the three settled down again to that happy feminine home life which many persons refuse to believe in, but which has its own pleasures and fewer troubles than are found in married life.

One day the Vicar of the parish called

upon them and begged them to help to visit his poor people in the East End, for he had undertaken to work a district there in order to help a friend who was overworked. Mr. Philips, he said, would call upon them and explain the needs. When Mr. Philips came he could hardly speak connectedly, for it seemed to him that his old love had risen from the grave of the past in the person of Miss Sibyl Evans. It was the same beautiful face; even the same look and the same voice; but there was a strange, subdued, and quiet manner about Sibyl which Minnie Gordon had never possessed. But the name of Evans conveyed no idea of relationship, so he concluded that Miss Sibyl had a wonderful power of personifying some one else. Not that she was quite like his lost Minnie when she spoke, for her lips seldom parted into one of the bewitching smiles which had cost him his peace of mind.

No one till now had taken Minnie's place; the Curate had said that no one ever should, and that her image should live for ever in the shrine he had made for it; but here was a being who was, as it were, a duplicate of his love; and when he went out of the house, the Rev. Nathaniel Philips took his leave feeling that the spring of his life had returned. He had not yet learnt wisdom, and had not found the place of understanding.

CHAPTER LVII. A DISCOVERY.

THE red diary had been duly received by Mr. Blackston, but all that was of real consequence in it had been burnt. To herself, when she framed her thoughts into words, Mrs. Gordon said:

"The whole story is a make-up of that woman; the marriage never took place, or if it did it was a mere farce, and the present owners of the Warren are the only true heirs. By-and-by, when Bee and Minnie are married, I will investigate the story and find those girls something to do. Some small allowance might be offered to them, some compensation for their past disappointment." Deeper down in that region of the mind where, if one may say so, the thought requires no words, Mrs. Gordon felt: "Supposing they are the real owners, how soon need it be known? I must wait and consider; in the meanwhile——"

Mr. Blackston sent back a polite note to the effect that he had examined the papers and the little book sent to him; and though

this latter was of a very affecting character, he could find no real statement or fact of any legal value, and he was now fully confirmed in his previous opinion. Mrs. Gordon need trouble herself no further about the matter; she had done all that was required and more than was necessary to vindicate her rights.

Mrs. Gordon handed the note over to Austin and Bee, who both read it in silence and returned it. Bee was very glad, but Austin could not forget that what was a joy to his mother was only an addition to Grace's sorrow. He longed to leap over the social barrier his mother had so clearly shown him to be impassable, but he felt that his mother must be right; and thus drawn so powerfully both ways, Austin remained passive, rebelling at the force of circumstance, and blaming himself for doing nothing and for wishing to act against all false ideas.

The wedding day dawned at last, a bright winter's day, which was all that could be desired. The Captain looked proud and happy, and was not even shy; the bridesmaids were intent on attracting more attention than the bride, and Minnie tried hard to avoid looking at Harry or finding herself alone with him.

When the bride had departed the Warren guests intended to make merry; for in the evening they were to have a ball, and Minnie knew she would have to play a double part, and this puzzled even her elastic conscience. Austin, feeling reckless, gave himself up to his duties of host, and was even extremely polite to the young ladies especially invited for his benefit. He felt that he did not care much which of them his mother eventually selected for him. She might as well choose, as he could never love any one but Grace. This was the real feeling which lay hid under the pleasant, courteous manner which gained for him golden opinions from old and young.

"There, this wedding is over," sighed Minnie, when the bride and bridegroom drove away; "now we may begin decorating the hall. What a bother, though, that Bee is not here to help us!"

The guests, of course, volunteered to help, and very soon the old rooms would hardly have been recognised by Grace and Sibyl.

Every one was coming to the ball, and Minnie looked radiant at the thought. She meant to look lovely, she meant to captivate still more her officer's heart, and

she meant to be married before the summer was ended, for she would enjoy life a great deal more as Mrs. Bond than she could possibly do as Miss Minnie Gordon; only this evening must safely be lived through, and tact and wisdom were necessary.

Mrs. Gordon moved among the guests, looking the picture of a proud and happy mother, for "everything had gone off well," and the phrase was repeated on all sides.

Minnie enjoyed quite a triumph this evening. Her charming manners, her beauty, everything about her made her the centre of attraction and the willing recipient of compliments. Only Harry Laurence—shy and awkward in society—stood off from her; but his eyes scarcely left her. He had come to the Warren hoping to receive a word or a look which meant happiness for him, but instead of this he only got a careless smile, such as Minnie dealt out to every one.

Major Bond arrived late, and his first glance showed him a thing of beauty in the person of Miss Minnie Gordon. He settled at once that he had chosen well. She was quite the prettiest girl in the room; she would not pass unnoticed in the crowd, and she would reflect glory on himself and on the regiment—glory not unaccompanied by a golden shimmer. However, as the engagement was not public, he did nothing unbecoming, and did not take undue possession of her; but, as he took her programme, he felt proud to write his initials in the spaces the young lady had left for him.

Just then Harry, too, came up, hoping for the same favour, and saw that his star had waned.

The conservatory had been thrown open and lighted for the occasion. It is curious why lovers especially appreciate these glass houses, where they are liable to encounter those who throw stones, but so it is; and it was in here that Minnie and the Major wandered when they had gone through the required amount of social pretence. Not that Minnie was at all anxious about a love scene; she had had almost too much of that with Harry. However, she must go through with her fate; besides, the Major in private was prepared to say very pretty things, such as he knew well how to say, and Minnie was not sorry to listen.

In his waistcoat pocket lay the engagement ring, and very soon he drew it forth, and, holding Minnie's small gloved hand, said, in a low voice:

"We must take this off. See, Minnie, I have chosen you what I fancy will be to your taste."

It was certainly quite in Minnie's taste—a hoop of pearls and diamonds. She had never possessed anything half so beautiful before, and it seemed to her the forerunner of many more such gifts, made to enhance her beauty.

She looked up, when the ring encircled her finger, with one of her most pleasant looks, whilst the softened light and the background of ferns and flowers made her appear like some lovely wood-nymph rising from a ferny bower.

"My darling——" murmured the Major.

But his further speech was put an end to by the figure of a man walking into the conservatory with a most decided step. Minnie shrank back, for she already knew Harry's step.

"Take me back to the hall, please," she said hastily; but Harry was before her.

"I have been looking for you," he said, almost rudely.

The tone, more than the words, roused the Major's indignation.

"Miss Gordon is engaged at present," he said haughtily.

"So I see," answered Harry, in the same tone; "but you forget, Miss Gordon, that you promised me this dance."

Minnie had forgotten, that was true. She had forgotten everything but the future, which lit up the present with so much glory.

"I am very sorry, but——"

But the Major ended the sentence.

"I must beg you to remember the courtesy due to a lady, sir," he said, in a contemptuous manner, "due, also, to my future wife."

If Harry wanted anything to recall him to his senses he had it now. All the evening he had been mad with jealousy, trying to get near to Minnie, just to touch her hand, or to hear her say something to him, and now——he could not believe it. He forgot where he was, and he certainly forgot his manners.

"It is not true," he said hoarsely; "tell me, Minnie," he had only once before called her so, "say it is not true. I shall not believe any one else. I shall say they lie."

Minnie was visibly trembling, but she retained enough self-control to be dignified.

"I think, Mr. Laurence, you had better leave me, you are forgetting yourself; but if you will not believe the word of a

gentleman, I need hardly trouble myself to confirm it. I am engaged to Major Bond."

Harry waited to hear no more; happily he was close to the door, and turning away as if he hardly knew what he was doing, he walked out of the hall into the cloak-room, put on his great-coat, and, in spite of the footman's stare, he went out of the garden door and far away upon the moor. He wanted to think—he wanted to make sure that he was not dreaming; that it was Minnie herself who had spoken to him thus, and he could realise the truth better here on the wide, lonely heath, over which the cold wind was blowing this evening in no gentle manner. Poor Harry! it was the downfall of his first love, just, too, when he fancied he had attained, or almost attained, his object, just when he could have fallen at the feet of his divinity and called her his. But now this newcomer, this officer who had not known her half as long as he had nor loved her at all, according to Harry's idea of loving, had won her—faithless, fickle woman! Then he reproached himself for calling her anything unkind, and made excuses for her, whilst he called down all the evil he could frame on the head of the Major.

At the Warren no one noticed his departure save Minnie, and she breathed a sigh of relief as if she were now able to enjoy her new honour. Now that the secret were out there was no more need of concealing the event, and Minnie, going up to her mother, who, for a few moments, was standing gazing thoughtfully at the merry throng, said quietly:

"Mother, Major Bond told some one of our engagement, so there is no more need for secrecy."

"Did he? I am sorry it was to-night; however, as you say, there is no more need for keeping it to ourselves; but do tell Austin, it will please him so much; besides, he ought to know first."

Minnie sought out her brother; she was in a tender mood, quite captivating, and really a little upset by the event.

Austin, having just finished a duty dance with a very plain young lady, who, his mother told him, was an heiress, and who must be especially looked after, was standing in a corner of the hall looking decidedly gloomy. He felt that life was all wrong and out of joint. Every hope he had had, every beautiful picture he had painted on the canvas of the future was suddenly brushed rudely away by what he

had heard. He felt in no way to care about anything, perhaps least of all about Minnie's engagement.

"Austin, dear," said Minnie, looking up at him as she put the ungloved jewelled hand on his arm, "Austin, do come down from the clouds and wish me joy."

He certainly did come down from the clouds, as his sister Minnie in no way represented anything angelic to him.

"Joy, what about?"

"Can't you guess? Look."

"What! Have you followed Bee's example? Couldn't you let her have the sole glory to-day?"

"How oddly you put it! It was just to let her have it all her own way that I did not tell you before. Major Bond made me an offer a few days ago, but I waited for Bee till to-night. He gave me the ring. Isn't it a beauty?"

"I dare say it is. I am no judge of jewellery."

"Austin, what a way to talk about an engagement! Some day we shall see you in love, and then, I dare say, you will be making verses to your ladylove's eyebrows."

"Not at all likely; besides—but look, Minnie, there is Major Bond."

The Major, happily, did not expect any great demonstration of joy from Minnie's brother, and took Austin's very mild murmurs for a congratulation as he led off the future bride for another dance. It had been whispered round the room that Major Bond was an accepted lover; it gave a spur to the entertainment.

The next person who noticed the dejection of Mrs. Gordon's son was the Doctor, who, in spite of his wife's delight, was trying to think "this sort of thing" not too tiresome.

"You don't dance, Mr. Gordon?" he said, in his pleasant voice. "You are not yet presuming to reckon yourself among the elders?"

"I don't think dancing is much in my line, Dr. Smith," then impelled to speak of what was in his thought, Austin added: "My sister Beatrice spoke to you, I believe, about some papers she found concerning the family—about James Gordon."

Doctor Smith was surprised at another of the family mentioning the subject, and on such an occasion.

"Ah, poor things, I was thinking of them myself to-night; one in my position can hardly help doing so."

"You knew these girls very well, I think?"

"Yes, Grace and Sibyl were almost like my own children. And then there was their excellent friend, Miss Evans. Well, I half fancied—to you I must not say I half hoped—that when your sister mentioned those papers to me it might lead to a discovery, but I hear from Blackston to-night that there is nothing of legal importance in the diary."

"In the diary? But I thought there were other papers. Ah! that diary is very sad. James Gordon must have been a rascal. I am sure we ought to be sorry to inherit anything from him."

"I fear no one can look too closely into the character of their ancestors; but really if you had known those girls I think you would have felt a real interest in them."

"Do you think all has been done, Dr. Smith, to discover the truth?" said Austin, with energy.

"Yes, certainly. Why not? Blackston was as anxious as myself to find a way out of the difficulty. But it was altogether a mysterious affair."

"But was there not some church named in the diary?" said Austin, quickly. "I suppose the marriage could not have been legal, yet—"

"No, I think not; Blackston said nothing of it, or that, of course, would have settled the question, unless the church registers have been burnt—which would be almost too marvellous. By the way, I think I may congratulate you on another happy event in your family to-night."

"Yes, almost too much of a good thing for the neighbourhood," said Austin, half smiling; and then the Doctor turned to speak to some one else, and Austin remained there, suddenly trying to recall what he had read in that diary.

How stupid he had been not to look at it more carefully, and how curious that this easy solution should not have struck him; he had believed that, of course, his mother or the lawyer saw it as well. Anyhow, he would ask Mr. Blackston what church was mentioned.

Mr. Blackston, very near to his wife and daughter, was discoursing the other side of the room; the dancing was separating the talkers. Austin would find some difficulty in joining them; and so it happened that before he had made his way across, a curious feeling, which he

could not account for, made him frame his question differently.

"How do you admire the hall, Mr. Blackston?" began Austin, as naturally as he could; "you must remember it in its old days—in James Gordon's time, I mean? I believe he did nothing to it all the time he lived here."

Mr. Blackston was also astonished at young Mr. Gordon bringing up the subject of his dead cousin at such a time. James Gordon and a wedding festivity were certainly incongruous.

"Poor fellow! very strange he was; he hated the sight of any improvement about the place. I often suggested that he ought to do something to this hall; and after all, it was not he, but Mrs. Gordon who has had to do it. Putting off was his great failing; that is one among several others even more important, perhaps."

"You saw the—papers my mother sent to you?" said Austin, quietly.

If only Grace could know that he was doing this for her sake, even though there would be, perhaps, nothing to be gained!

"The diary? Yes, yes; it has no legal value at all. However, it is most disinterested of your mother to sift the matter to the bottom; but even this writing is merely a fragment—some of the pages are wanting."

Austin remembered this fact perfectly; but then he also remembered the mention of some church which Mr. Blackston did not allude to.

"Yes, I saw some leaves had been cut out." So saying, he set at rest the shade of doubt which had flitted across the lawyer's mind with reference to these same pages. Mr. Blackston had no real reason to doubt, but a lawyer thinks it his duty to live in a state of mind ready for doubt and investigation; here, however, was one of the first discoverers of the diary who casually, and therefore truthfully, corroborated his statement, for naturally he had noticed that some leaves were missing from the diary.

"I should like to have another look at the book," said Austin; "I had not time to read it carefully. Have you got it, or has my mother taken it back?"

"I have got it at my office, and if you will call to-morrow I shall be delighted to show it to you. Otherwise it should, I think, be sent to those poor girls. Ah! of course you never saw them, but Mrs. Gordon did; she was most kind to them, and very generous all through, but I

understand they have since behaved rather badly."

Austin was now learning more about these sisters; he was piecing the history which had previously been enveloped in so much mystery. He now understood better the cause of the sadness which had wrapped the sisters round so closely; and as to his mother's generosity, that certainly could not have been great when he thought of Grace's constant toll. Yet, though this thought maddened him, and though he longed to throw all considerations to the winds, he yet hesitated. He had his mother to think of, and his whole past had been so noble, so free from folly, that to despise all prejudice was harder to him than it would have been to a worthless young man.

MISS METHUEN'S MASTERPIECE.

IN TWO PARTS. PART I.

It was three o'clock in the afternoon, an hour at which Monsieur Fusain's studio, in the Rue Capouillet at Brussels, was wont to be given up to solitude and silence, when nothing remained of his large class of lady students save the unfinished work on a couple of dozen easels and drawing-boards. The work thus displayed was very seldom ambitious, for Monsieur Fusain's class was fashionable, rather than hardworking; as to the notice which hung over the stove, that the studio was free to any student who cared to avail herself of the light and the casts between the hours of two and four any afternoon, the privilege it offered was very little appreciated by the young ladies who assembled there in the morning, and dispersed punctually as the stroke of noon sounded from the *Porte de Hal*.

On this particular afternoon, however, the studio was neither solitary nor silent. Some one was working there, and that some one was not alone. So much was evident from the sounds which floated now and then across the courtyard to the verandah where Monsieur Fusain sat smoking with a friend.

"Do you know who that is in the atelier?" said the artist presently; then, without waiting for an answer, he continued: "It is my new pupil, Miss Methuen, your cousin."

The grave face of Monsieur Fusain's companion did not evince much interest in this announcement. He puffed once or

twice at his cigar, then, as he removed it from his lips to knock off the ash, he said slowly:

"Indeed."

"And this," proceeded Monsieur Fusain, in no wise rebuffed, "is the third afternoon she has been here within ten days. She has begun to model a head of Madame Van der Heyden, the noted beauty, you know. She is doing it in relief; it was her own idea."

"Indeed," said the other again; then he added, after a pause: "A harmless amusement for both of them."

"My dear De Lastrin," began the master, "I assure you your cousin is not merely amusing herself."

"It sounds like it," rejoined De Lastrin, as a peal of silvery laughter reached their ears.

"Ah, well, she's seriously at work for all that. She has talent, too—the family talent, you know. De Lastrin, I could make an artist out of the stuff in that girl."

De Lastrin smiled somewhat contemptuously.

"I doubt if you could," he answered, "even granting that she has the talent you give her credit for; which, mind you, I don't deny, for I know absolutely nothing of her powers. Whatever they may be, however, she has not come here with the idea of being schooled into an artist. It is quite as much the fashion in London as in Brussels to go in for a little artistic culture. The Methuens are very fashionable people. Of course, as they are wintering in Brussels, my cousin attends your classes; but when she goes back to London next spring to be presented at Court and to make her appearance in society, she will have no room in her home and no time in her day for easels and modelling-boards. She will carry nothing away from here but a little art jargon, a smattering of anatomy, and a delusion that she knows something of studio life, which will make a good show in conversation whenever such topics are on the carpet. And that will probably be the sum total of my cousin Dora's artistic career."

Monsieur Fusain looked at his friend for a few seconds in silence; there was a humorous twinkle in his deep-set grey eyes.

"Well," he said presently, "I shall survive the disappointment. I only said I could make an artist of her; I didn't say

I meant to try. Why should I, when I have such a warning before me as yourself? By the way, mon ami, are you painting now, or are you not?"

De Lastrin shook his head.

"I thought not," went on the master; "I thought so from the expression of your face. Yet a year ago, when you built that new studio, you were so full of good resolutions. Remember all you said then, and all you let me say to you."

"I remember it," replied De Lastrin; "but talking didn't change my nature. I'm like the King of Israel in the Bible, only, unfortunately, I have not yet found the shepherd-harpist who can beguile my melancholy."

"My dear fellow," cried his friend, "you have the remedy in yourself——"

"Fusain," broke in the other, "don't waste your breath on admonishing me; I know all you can say. You have said it many times; and do you think I have not said it to myself as many more? But it is of no use; I am as I am. I have the unfortunate disposition to desire continually a new stimulus; to detect conventionality in every relation of life; to feel the stereotyped monotony of modern society and modern culture so irksome that I long to break loose from it all——"

"And because you can't break loose from it all," interrupted Fusain, "because certain conditions—chiefly your position as head of one of the oldest families in Flanders—keep you in a fixed orbit, and give you definite duties, you weakly allow your energies to be paralysed by what you young fellows call 'the spleen.' My dear De Lastrin, I lose patience with you. You have everything that a man might desire—rank, fortune, talents, good looks—and yet, I should say, not the poorest gamin in the streets of Brussels gets less real pleasure out of his life than you do."

"I told you to spare your admonitions," said De Lastrin. "I should have thought you understood my case by this time. Do you think I encourage my fits of spleen? Do you think I am proud of the peculiarity which makes the whole world dismal to me and me dismal to the whole world? Everything is old and decrepit, and I am the oldest—I don't count by years—and most decrepit thing in existence. If I couldn't come and growl to you I should have no solace left. As to painting—how can I paint in such a mood?"

The artist smiled pityingly.

"And when the day comes," he asked,

"that you weary of me, as you weary of all things?"

"It won't come; selfishness will stave it off. The only quality of my own I have faith in is my selfishness."

Then there was a silence, broken only by the sounds from the studio opposite, where artist and model had evidently much that was entertaining to say to one another.

"By the way, Fusain," said De Lastrin at length, "I should rather like to have a look at my cousin's work if I may; you have roused my curiosity. I had no idea you would think so well of her. I must confess I have snubbed the child once or twice when she has tried to give the conversation an artistic turn."

"I can quite believe it," replied the artist, laughing; "but I think she is a young woman who will survive a considerable amount of snubbing, even of snubbing so unmerciful as yours. Come along."

Meanwhile, in the studio, among the easels and the casts, and the groups of still life, the subject of these remarks stood in front of her model, the rich afternoon light falling on her tall figure and auburn hair; her dark eyes were glowing with excitement, and there was a smile of disdain on her mobile lips as she turned to include in a sweeping gesture all the two dozen easels and all the unfinished work they displayed.

"A pitiful sight, isn't it?" she said. "Why, my dear Simonne, there is barely an ounce of talent among the whole lot of them. I feel quite impatient with Monsieur Fusain for allowing them to come here day after day to waste their time and his. What can the perpetrator of a thing like that, for instance, learn from a man like Fusain? Nothing, my dear, absolutely nothing; their souls are too far apart. I hope no one thinks I am on the level of such bunglers. Why, I have more talent in my little finger than any of the rest have in their whole bodies. That sounds conceited, doesn't it? But really it's not a high valuation of myself. Ask Fusain; he will tell you the same. I know he thinks well of my powers; indeed, there is only one person of my acquaintance who does not allow that I am capable of something. Not that I believe him to be a real judge, but he gives himself the air of being one."

"I suppose," said Miss Methuen's companion, a delicate-featured blonde, "I

suppose you mean your cousin, Monsieur le Marquis de Lastrin?"

"And why do you guess him?" asked Miss Methuen, a shade of petulance in her voice.

"My dearest Dora, do I not know the man? Have I not heard him talk?"

"You have not heard him talk of me, I hope!" broke in the girl.

"Oh dear, no. If your cousin condescends to have an opinion of you, he would not vouchsafe to disclose it to me. But one knows the pretensions he gives himself about art, goodness knows why; one never sees anything he has drawn or painted, and, moreover, is he not the most incorrigibly blasé person in the world?"

"He is a bear!" cried Miss Methuen. "You should have heard how he answered me when I told him something about my painting and modelling. Does he think it clever to set up for superiority in that empty way?"

Madame Van der Heyden smiled; the girl had spoken so warmly.

"He does not appear to have much hold on your cousinly affection," she said.

"I should think not," exclaimed Miss Methuen.

"And yet," continued the other, "for all his—shall we call them idiosyncrasies?—he does manage to get a hold on some people's affection. In fact, my dear, I should think few men in Brussels have inspired a greater number of hopeless passions than your cousin Gilbert."

"Simonne!" cried Miss Methuen, incredulously. "Don't romance. What woman could be so foolish as to even like him? I saw him once when he was a boy—we have met but rarely, you know, though our mothers are sisters—he was detestable then, but now he is far worse. That curt style of his is hateful. Do you know, dear," here she lowered her voice impressively, "do you know, I have made up my mind—and I have a strong will of my own—to bring that man to his senses."

Madame Van der Heyden smiled again. "Bring De Lastrin to his senses?" she repeated. "My dearest child, do you know the danger of playing with edged tools?"

"Oh, I'm not afraid of him," responded Miss Methuen. "I suspect he has found that much out already, after one or two attempts and failures to crush me by his high and mighty sarcasm. And, you'll see, if I make up my mind to bring him to his senses, sooner or later I shall succeed."

This time Madame Van der Heyden laughed outright.

"I wish you joy of your undertaking, and if, by mishap, it should have the climax I fear instead of the one you intend, come to me for consolation, dear. I've had a world of experience in troubles of that sort."

"I don't understand you," said Miss Methuen loftily. "And now, will you kindly get into your pose again? No, that is not quite right; your mouth was grave when I began it, and now it's contorted into a grin."

"I'm very sorry," replied her model penitently, "but really you have to thank yourself for having upset the equilibrium of my facial muscles."

Then there was a silence, during which Miss Methuen worked diligently.

"There," she said at length; "I will release you now. You are a perfect angel of long-suffering patience, but it is in a good cause. And don't you think I am getting on splendidly? I really feel thoroughly satisfied with everything in the world—including myself. Now you must come home and have tea with us, and tell my mother how profitably we have spent the afternoon. She can't forgive me, you know, for preferring this musty studio to a drive in the Bois or a series of calls." As she talked the girl damped a cloth and hung it over the medallion, and then proceeded to take off the long holland smock which swathed her tall figure from neck to feet.

"I should dearly love," began Madame Van der Heyden, who was arranging her dainty little bonnet before a small looking-glass, "I should dearly love to see you set about your great task of bringing Monsieur de——"

Then and there she stopped abruptly, for the studio door opened, and Monsieur Fassin's voice from the threshold said:

"Mesdames, I bring you a visitor. Mademoiselle, Monsieur de Lastrin begs to be allowed to see the medallion at which you are working."

De Lastrin included both ladies in a stately bow, to which his cousin replied with a genial smile.

"I'm not fit to be shaken hands with," she said. "I was just on the way to wash the clay off, and I fear I cannot uncover my medallion again to-day. You may see it, however, when it is finished," she added, with a little air of condescension.

Monsieur Fusain looked disappointed. Monsieur de Lastrin did not.

"She wants me to insist," was his mental comment, "and I shall do no such thing."

"But, mademoiselle," began the master in a tone of remonstrance, "monsieur your cousin is an excellent judge of art, as perhaps you know. You are losing an opportunity of a valuable criticism."

"I fear, Monsieur Fusain," replied Miss Methuen sweetly, "that I have not a proper appreciation of the value of criticism; besides, it is not a critic's business to judge unfinished work."

"I cannot agree with you entirely as to that," said De Lastrin. "Still," he added, turning to the artist, "I would not be indiscreet enough to offer criticism where it is not asked; and I quite understand mademoiselle's reluctance to show incomplete work."

"Ah, well," said Monsieur Fusain reluctantly, "I am sorry. I wanted you to see what she can do."

"And so he shall, monsieur," rejoined the girl amiably. "I am hoping to give my friends a private view on Saturday at the latest. You must come, Gilbert," she went on, turning to her cousin; "remember it is an invitation, and I will hear all you have to say then."

"I am infinitely obliged to you, Miss Methuen," responded De Lastrin gravely. Then with another bow he followed Monsieur Fusain from the studio.

"And so you ought to be infinitely obliged," said Miss Methuen, when the door had closed, "seeing that you have learnt that there is some one who refuses to be patted on the back at the pleasure of your lordship."

"Prologue to the great work," said Madame Van der Heyden; "first scene of first act to be given on Saturday at the latest, if the leading gentleman is there to take his part. My dear Dora, I congratulate you so far."

"Now promise me you'll come on Saturday," Monsieur Fusain was saying at the same moment, as De Lastrin took leave of him.

"I won't run the chance of breaking my word," said the other. "I won't vouch for my curiosity surviving so long. And, you know," he added, with a half-sneer, "she would have gratified it now if I had pressed the point."

"Then why didn't you press the point?"

De Lastrin shrugged his shoulders. "Can't you imagine me," he asked, "pandering to the vanity of a silly schoolgirl?"

The following day Miss Methuen and her model were again in the studio; but Monsieur Fusain heard little talk and no laughter proceeding thence as he sat smoking in the verandah. If silence meant serious work, there was no doubt that his promising pupil was making the most of her time. Appearances were, however, as usual, not to be trusted, for Miss Methuen was not making satisfactory progress.

"Oh dear, oh dear," she cried at last, "I can do nothing this afternoon—absolutely nothing. It all looked so nice yesterday, and now I have spoilt your upper lip, and I have tried at the curve of your nostril until I am almost in despair."

"My dear Dora," returned her model, "don't get vexed with yourself. It will all come right in time."

"It won't," retorted the girl irritably. "It might if I could see where the fault lies, but I can't, and I've got no one to show me. It is no use to come and work here without understanding what one is about. Why can't old Fusain give me a look sometimes? I feel just now as if I must crush the whole thing back to a mass of shapeless clay."

"My dear," cried Madame Van der Heyden, "what a change in the atmosphere! Hadn't you better leave off before you do something irremediable?"

"I can't leave off," still more irritably. "How shall I finish by Saturday if I leave off now?"

"I see," said the other significantly. "I see what it all means. This great private show is on your mind. Now, really, dear, is the game worth the candle?"

"Some games are worth a good many candles," rejoined Dora, as she turned resolutely back to her work.

"You are immensely kind to say such pretty things of my little attempt," said Miss Methuen, to one after another of the friends whom she had invited to her private view. "I only hope you won't make me unbearably conceited by so much flattery. It is, perhaps, a good thing that my cousin, Gilbert de Lastrin, is not here to supply a wholesome corrective."

For Monsieur de Lastrin's curiosity had apparently not survived until the end of the week, and in Miss Methuen's heart of

hearts there was a hardly confessed sensation of disappointment that none of her acquaintances had been surprised by his appearing on the scene, not to mention the humiliation of feeling that he had ignored her invitation. When every one had gone she still lingered, scarcely admitting to herself that she was allowing him a few minutes' grace, yet her heart certainly beat quicker when the door opened once more and the servant announced "Monsieur le Marquis de Lastrin."

She turned towards him with a gracious smile.

"A moment more," she said, "and I should have left the studio, carrying my medallion with me. Think what a disappointment that would have been for us both."

"I should have regretted it," he replied, looking not at her, but at her work, which was hung in the most favourable light the studio afforded.

"Take care," cried Dora gaily; "you must not say anything I can construe into a compliment. I have had too many already, and I don't expect such things from you."

He appeared not to hear her remark—he certainly vouchsafed no answer to it. For some minutes he examined the medallion in silence.

"Your model is considered one of the beauties of Brussels," he said, somewhat irrelevantly, when he spoke at last.

There was another pause.

"You are pleased with it?" he began again abruptly.

"Well, supposing that I am, what then?"

"Then I congratulate you."

"That is rather ambiguous. On what do you congratulate me?"

"On having achieved what pleases you," was his reply.

"And supposing I am not pleased," resumed Dora, "how then?"

She hardly knew why she said it—why she allowed his impossibility to make her communicative.

De Lastrin gave a sharp glance into her face. "If that be the case," he said, "I congratulate you still more warmly. I congratulate you on being able to see instead of for being blind."

Dora's eyes flashed for a moment. "I hope I am clear-sighted enough," she rejoined, trying to steady a tell-tale tremor in her voice, "to see without any help

that the thing is an utter failure. I hope I am sincere enough to judge even my own work fairly."

"You form a remarkable exception to the rest of your species if you are," he said drily; then there was another long pause; "but," he continued, and there was a decided softening in his tone, "you are wrong in calling it an utter failure—just as wrong as if you had fancied it a complete success. You would have done better, if," he spoke slowly and hesitatingly, "if—to be quite honest—you had known how to."

He looked into her face, and she noticed that his large grey eyes were brighter than she had ever before seen them. "How he enjoys the part he is playing!" was her mental comment. Aloud she said:

"Of course I wish you to be honest, but I may as well tell you that both my London master and Monsieur Fusain consider me quite capable of working from life."

"Which," rejoined her cousin coolly, "is in a certain sense true. Life is the one and only school for the art student; but—to continue speaking honestly—the work should be very humble and very patient. Your masters, Fusain included, have flattered you. You have talent, it is true; but if you want to run you must first learn to walk. You have apparently not the least inkling of the long drudgery which is necessary before your hand and eye have the technical skill necessary to success in such an undertaking as this. Your talent is absolutely helpless without that technical skill." De Lastrin spoke with unwonted animation.

"Pedantic creature," thought Dora; "I suppose he picks up all these phrases for the sake of sounding superior. I have always done all that my masters have suggested," she informed him in reply. "I suppose I shall grow more skilful in time."

"My dear cousin," he rejoined in the same tone, "that is just what you will not do. You will—if you continue to work on the lines you are now following—always be conscious of a lack in your powers of execution and in what you achieve. This attempt and its result will repeat itself ad infinitum. Perhaps you will not care if it is so—perhaps you aim no higher."

"I aim as high as I can get," she said petulantly; "and I do not understand the vague things you say about the lines I work on."

Her tone seemed lost on De Lastrin. He was once more looking intently at

the medallion. Presently he spoke again, slowly and constrainedly.

"I would be less vague some other time if you would allow me," he said. "I might look in some afternoon when you are at work here and explain myself. I do not think Fusain would object even if I made a few suggestions."

"You are very kind," rejoined Dora, with chilly politeness. "Of course, I should be grateful for any suggestions of value."

Then De Lastrin looked at his watch, and took a hurried leave, as if the time he could never kill to his own satisfaction were infinitely precious.

"If I had had a grain of spirit," soliloquised Miss Methuen as she drove homewards, "I should have told him not to come. How could I allow myself to be patronised so detestably? And oh, what vanity to set himself up as an authority higher than such masters as I have had! What would Simonne say if I told her all about it? She would laugh at me, indeed."

So it came about that Madame Van der Heyden heard but an outline of the scene which had taken place. Even in that she found food for merriment.

"Going to help you with your drawing," she laughed. "My dear Dora, I shouldn't have thought you wanted another master. And do remember that the relation between master and pupil is rather a dangerous one."

"My dear Simonne," replied Miss Methuen, "if I never run any greater danger than the present one, my peace of mind will be tolerably secure."

"Wait till the lessons are over, my dear. There is an old proverb which warns us not to shout before we are out of the wood." And Madame Van der Heyden looking extremely wise, seated herself at the piano and began to accompany herself softly while she sang Carmen's weird, sweet song, "*Si tu ne m'aimes pas, je t'aime, et si je t'aime prends garde à toi.*"

THE LOAN COLLECTION OF PICTURES AT GUILDHALL.

IN 1890, when the Corporation of London first opened an exhibition of pictures lent to them by generous owners, the experiment met with overwhelming success. The galleries, which, as a rule, are hung with gigantic canvases of an awe-inspiring kind, of which the permanent

collection of the Corporation mostly consists, presented a great contrast to their usual gloom. In the middle of the day they were thronged almost to suffocation. Clerks, merchants, professional men, ladies passing through the City, workgirls, and visitors specially attracted to the spot—all came to enjoy the entertainment provided for them. The exhibition was free; an excellent catalogue was provided for sixpence, and the collection included Reynolds's beautiful portraits of the three Ladies Waldegrave, some very fine Holman Hunts, two of Millais's best landscapes, Leighton's beautiful "Summer Moon," and some good works of the Italian, Flemish, and Dutch schools. It was only right that such a success should be repeated, and there is now being shown in the galleries a collection even more interesting than the last. The bulk of the pictures are English, and rightly so, for this exhibition is thrown open to all sorts and conditions of men, and is intended for the people rather than for the connoisseur, and as such should not be too far over the heads of the multitude.

The Corporation is very much to be congratulated on providing recreation for busy workers in the heart of the City where it can be of some use to them; they have not time, even if they had the inclination, to journey all the way to South Kensington, where legislative wisdom seems to consider it necessary to bury everything that is connected with an exhibition. It is much too far away from any working centre to be of use as a museum for the benefit of the poorer classes. That they do sometimes go there is greatly to their credit, and as a proof that it is principally pictures of the English school that they enjoy, one has only to point to the popularity of the Chantry collection, the galleries in which it is hung being always much fuller than any other in the Museum. Why could not this collection be moved Citywards and form the nucleus of a permanent Corporate collection? It would be much more useful than where it is now, and it is just the thing that is wanted. It certainly does contain some pictures of inferior merit—that is, judged from an artistic standpoint—and one might with justice cavil at the judgement of the Council of the Royal Academy, who ought in such matters to direct popular taste; but these inferior pictures are often very popular with the multitude, and may be very good from

their point of view. It may possibly be poor art that attracts them, but at any rate it is better than no art at all, and if by chance they lack the cultivation necessary to appreciate the higher art, that is no reason why they should be deprived of what they can enjoy. They and all people can only appreciate to the extent of their cultivation. That they do enjoy pictures is clearly shown by the extent to which they take advantage of the opportunities offered them by the liberality of the Corporation. Let us hope that this great success may induce the Corporation to improve their permanent collection by the purchase from time to time of good modern pictures, much as the pictures are purchased from the Chantrey fund. Such purchases would not only be an encouragement to artists, but would help to keep the public in touch with the best contemporary art—that is, if the pictures were selected with care, and that such would be the case is fully guaranteed by the wisdom with which the selection now on view has been made.

The great benefit in an exhibition of this kind in the City is that it enables many who have no time during the day to get to the West End, to turn in for a short time occasionally and see some pictures. The opening of picture galleries in the evening does not accomplish the same purpose, for there are few who, having worked hard during the day, care to turn out at night to look at pictures. Possibly if the exhibition were close at hand they might do so, and where there has been any such opening, as in the notable instance of Mr. Barnett's annual Whitechapel exhibition, the attendance is very large. The people cannot be brought to the pictures, therefore the pictures must be brought to the people. The finest museum, as in the case of the evening opening of the British Museum, will not invite, if it be not get-at-able. The British Museum, it will be said, is handy for the lower classes of Drury Lane, but the answer to that is that the class is too low. It is the working class, not the loafers and ne'er-do-wells, who should be considered, and the people to consider them are such bodies as the Corporation of London, who in other matters, such as the securing of open spaces, have done yeomen's service.

This exhibition, then, is a great stride in the right direction, and all honour is

due to the Corporation for their liberality in throwing open the exhibition free of charge. The hanging of the pictures has been exceptionally well done under the superintendence of Mr. A. G. Temple, who is also responsible for the very excellent catalogue.

Now that the purpose and the possibilities of the exhibition have been referred to, let us turn to the pictures themselves. It would have been almost impossible to have set to work to gather together a collection in a more catholic spirit, and the greatest credit is due to those responsible that they have taken this view, for their aim should be to include, as much as possible, all phases of art and please all tastes. It must be remembered in considering the pros and cons of the case that ideals change from time to time; that the ideals of youth differ from those of maturity, and that these again differ from those of old age; that the ideals of a nation at one period of its existence differ from those of another period, and the ideals of one nation from those of another nation; all these changes being the result of temperament or climate or such considerations which cause one race to differ from another. Then, again, there is also great fashion in art, and fashion, as we know, is continually changing, the changes being due to more trivial causes than those which lead to the changes or, as it should be said, the development of ideals. Changes of fashion in art take place within much shorter periods than changes of ideals. What was admired twenty years ago will possibly not be looked at now; this is due to change in fashion; that which was fashionable at the earlier period may have been so from causes quite outside its artistic merit. But when we come to a revolution in the admiration of works by old masters, this is due more to a change of ideal, as, for instance, the decline in popularity of Murillo, and the much greater appreciation of Velasquez. Therefore, in an exhibition of this kind, it was a wise dispensation by those responsible for the arrangement of this collection to disregard fashion, and to bring together representative pictures not only of the tastes which may now be in the ascendant, but of those which have been current for the last forty years.

The modern pictures exhibited here do not go further back than that period, known as the period of pre-Raphaelitism,

here shown by the beautiful work of Sir John Millais and by the dreamy women of Rossetti. And let it here be said that no one should miss the opportunity of seeing the three pictures which show what a great artist Millais was at that period of his career when he was only about twenty-four years of age. The finest of the three—there is a fourth exhibited, but it is unimportant—is the "Ophelia" painted in 1851, a work of consummate beauty, finished with the most exquisite and loving care, the background painted by inches, looking like the work of a naturalist, vivid in colour and marvellous in detail. Minute, however, as it is, it does not detract from the beauty of the figure slowly sinking through the transparent waters; nor prevent one from seeing how beautifully the hands just sinking are painted!

On the wall nearly opposite to it hangs the famous "Huguenots," painted and exhibited in the same year as the "Ophelia." The colour is most beautiful, and the method is the same. Both of these pictures possess that beautiful nervous artistic merit which is so difficult to define, and which no one, not even Ruskin, has succeeded in defining satisfactorily. In these two pictures one can almost see the artist feeling his way, and it is this nervous force which gives the pictures their beauty. In the larger picture, "The Vale of Rest," there is not the same feeling; there is beauty, great poetical beauty, in the landscape; but there is a suggestion of ugliness about the picture. There is something uncanny in the idea of a woman digging a grave. Possibly the artist wished to lift it out of the commonplace. An old man digging a grave, with a dog and a small boy looking on, was a favourite subject with the British artist of that day, and had been painted to distraction. Millais, while feeling the real beauty, may have wished to avoid this. In comparison with the other two, this picture is almost broadly painted; but not in anything like the artist's present manner.

Next to "The Vale of Rest" hangs a beautiful work of Holman Hunt's—"Claudio and Isabella," painted in 1850. It possesses much of the same beauty as the Millais; but while it is more weird it lacks their force and simplicity. It is more like the work of a scholar as opposed to that of the artist.

Of the Rossettis here, the most important is "The Dream of Dante"; but

as a work of art it is too complex, for art always gains force by simplicity.

A more beautiful specimen of the post-painter's art is a single head called "Amelia," which is exquisite in colour. The tide of pre-Raphaelitism is carried down to the present day by Burne-Jones, who at least has always had this great quality—he has allowed others to talk while he has done the work.

There are many persons who say that they cannot understand his art. That such is the case, is their misfortune. It would need a lengthy disquisition on the principles of art to point out in what the excellences of Burne-Jones consist, which would be out of place here; but it may be pointed out that there is rightly much that is conventional in art, or, rather, conventionalised, rightly, because it is impossible to imitate Nature; such a proceeding is to enter into competition with Nature, and the result is unsatisfactory to art. The greatest landscape painters did not paint from Nature; they studied from Nature. Turner's pictures are, in the popular phrase, not a bit like the place, and yet he was the greatest landscape painter. Many artists now paint landscapes direct from Nature; but have any of them surpassed Turner? Turner did not enter into competition with Nature by imitating Nature; others do, with the usual result. So that it may be seen that there is much to be conventionalised in art, and the question is how far this should be carried.

Burne-Jones is a conventionalist, and carries it to a great extent, often with much beauty of composition. He does not consider it right, for instance, that a representation of the human figure should be a direct copy of Nature; but then, he is not like any modern impressionist, who goes about shrieking that he and he only is right and every one else wrong; but he goes and does his work in his own way, and proves to a great extent that there is much right on his side. Therein lies the greatness of Burne-Jones. He is not well represented in this exhibition. One of his pictures, "The Wheel of Fortune," is almost ugly in colour and repulsive in treatment. The artist has painted another version of the same subject, which is in the possession of Mr. A. J. Balfour, which is different and more satisfactory in colour. His second picture, "Love among the Ruins," has much beauty in it, but is unimportant.

A landscape, the treatment of which approaches the conventional method, is amongst one of the finest pictures in this exhibition. It is possible that any one standing in front of "The Minister's Garden," by the late Cecil Lawson, might say that Nature was not so low in tone. That may be so; but it would surely be impossible for any one to deny the poetical beauty of this exquisite sweep of country, which might be destroyed or interfered with if the foreground were higher in tone. Let him trust the artist, for he knew what he was about.

The work hanging next to this picture is the well-known one, "Applicants for Admission to a Casual Ward," by Luke Fildes. Judging by the crowds around it, it seems to have lost none of its popularity. Yet it is a very ugly picture, almost a caricature; it would make a very good book illustration, but as a large picture it seems a mistake. Still this is one of those pictures appealing to the multitude, and it is a great deal for an artist to be able to do that.

A picture of the same type and school, is the melancholy subject by Frank Holl, to which he gave the title, "The Lord gave and the Lord hath taken away, blessed be the name of the Lord." This picture, in 1868, obtained for Holl the travelling studentship of the Royal Academy. One is afraid that it would hardly do so now; but then the fashion has changed. In these early works of Holl's, the sentiment is always forced, even to straining point, nor is the technique good. There is no promise of the vigorous portrait painter into which he afterwards developed.

On the end wall of the large room is a collection of works by Watts, who shares with Burne-Jones the credit of working in his own way without persisting that everybody else is wrong. His work is not popular with the multitude; some cultivation of artistic taste is necessary to understand its vigour and its intellectuality. Many people look at it, as was the case when his "Love and Death" was exhibited at Whitechapel, but they hardly understand. They may have got a sort of general idea that here was a giant who composed fine things, which were outside their ken but which impressed them, so perhaps they were not so far wrong after all. But Watts is greater than this; he is a poet, witness his "Psyche" in the Chantrey Collection; witness also his

"Paolo and Francesca," and his "Love and Death" in this exhibition. He is a great portrait painter, as his portrait of Swinburne will show.

Another post-painter was the late Fred Walker, who is here represented by "The Old Gate." It is work which has faults; but who cannot forgive a few faults for the quiet poetic beauty of the scene? It is a type of subject which Walker painted several times; it has a quiet, beautiful melancholy, which is not overstrained like much that was painted about the same time.

An artist of a very different type is Orchardson, who is well represented by a picture of "Katherine and Petruchio," a very pleasing work, admirably portraying its subject, which is one of the numerous diverting quarrels which took place between this strange pair.

A school which, not so very long ago, attracted a good deal of attention is well represented here. The Venetian school, composed of several foreign and English artists, at one time, from a pecuniary point of view, made a good thing out of it, but it was overdone; there was too much repetition of the pretty-pretty, principally by De Blaas, so the craze has died out. Van Haanen, who was a long way the best of them, has a very fine picture here, "Venetian Washerwomen." The pose of the central figure is quite sculptural, but the finest thing about the picture is its colour. Curiously enough, one of the best pictures ever painted of modern Venice, which is exhibited in this exhibition, was not by one of the Venetian school. This is "The Piazza," by William Logsdail, who went to Venice as a very young man, having studied at Lincoln and Antwerp, and soon after his arrival painted this picture. It was a tremendous subject for a young man to tackle, and yet Logsdail, who loves to paint a crowd, has never better succeeded than in this picture. Some things there are in it which he would not do now, and he may possibly be able to paint even better; but in composition and almost in subject it remains his best work, and is certainly a most popular picture. From the same point of view, it would be impossible to select a better picture than Lady Butler's "Rorke's Drift." It is a subject that appeals to Englishmen, and is one of which they may well be proud. But, somehow, Englishmen, and women too, cannot paint battle pictures; there is

a want of go in them compared to those of Detaille, and still more of De Neuville. Some pathetic incident indirectly connected with battle, such as "The Roll-Call" or "The Last Muster," they can manage; these are subjects which can be seen apart from warfare, without, however, the attraction of the red coats. The din and slaughter of battle is altogether beyond their powers.

The Masons in this exhibition are a little disappointing, particularly after the beautiful "Pastoral Symphony" which was exhibited last year. Peter Graham has a large picture called "A Spate in the Highlands," which is, of its kind, a very good picture, but as serious landscape work is not successful. Besides the three pre-Raphaelite works by Millais, there are also three portraits of his latter period—"Miss Nina Lehman, afterwards Lady Campbell," "Lady Campbell, born Lehman," and what is really a portrait, "Sweetest eyes were ever seen." All three, especially the latter, possess much beauty, but for artistic quality will not compare with his earlier work. They have too much the appearance of having been painted for reproduction by the illustrated papers, and suggest money. Hanging next to Millais's "Huguenots" is a beautiful picture, "An Idyl," by a young impressionist, Maurice Greiffenhagen. One is startled at first by the daring boldness of the colour, the bright red hair, the purple robe, and the deep red poppies; but a longer examination reveals an exquisite charm. The composition is satisfying, the girl's face is beautiful. There is a dash of eccentricity about it; but what matter? In art, at least, the eccentricities of one age are the commonplaces of another. There was a time when the critics "slated" Millais's "Huguenots," when they thought it full of eccentricities; they would not do so now. Greiffenhagen's picture is slightly painted, suggested rather than painted. He comes of a school which, as a rule, mistakes the means for the end; he has certainly not done so here.

Besides the modern English work, there are some fine pictures by the old masters, admirably chosen, some by rare masters, as Albert Dürer and Stephen of Cologne; but in this article the wish is rather to draw attention to the modern English school from a popular point of view.

Again, there are beautiful things by Reynolds and Gainsborough, and a very fine Turner. These are artists whose works

have stood the test of ages; about their merits there is no cavil. One can only stroll round and enjoy these works; there is no call to criticise. Yet it is sad to see some of Reynolds's most beautiful portraits literally crumbling away. One of them, "Lady Elizabeth Foster, afterwards Duchess of Devonshire," is very far gone. One of the most beautiful Duchesses of the present day was seen looking at this portrait a little while since, and the question naturally arose, who is there that can paint such a portrait now? Is the answer No one? Why is it that directly a man succeeds in painting a fine portrait of a pretty woman, he subsides into that awful being—a fashionable portrait painter? Is it money?

FLORENCE IN SPRING.

FLORENCE in April and May is provocative of a sort of spiritual delirium at times. What a rare tonic then is its sweet air, just agreeably iced by the snow of the distant mountains which are in such impressive contrast with the hot blue of the sky, and the lively verdure of the gardens now pushing on fast towards the luxuriance of early summer! The pink and white of blossoms are in every orchard, and the streets of the fair old city are odorous with the thickets of flowers brought hither for the temptation of the pockets of strangers and citizens alike. A man need not suffer a moment's depression here from dawn to bed-time. The Florentines are as cheerful as their atmosphere. The waiter of the hotel who brings you your coffee in the morning beams with smiles as he gives you his methodical "Buon giorno, sinny." He does not think it necessary to tell you it is a fine day; he assumes that you take it for granted, or have enough experience of the weather in Florence to know that though one hour the rain may fall with dolorous determination, the succeeding hour and all the rest of the day will be glorious with sunshine. How the vines will then grow apace, and the birds—such of them as can escape the merciless snarers ever on the watch for them—will sing! And again in the evening when the day's pleasure has begun to pall, though you go to ever so humble a restaurant for your meal, you will be enlivened by the tinkle of the mandoline, and perhaps a merry song or two. This is as regular a thing as the soup;

and a very charming part of the menu it is. What if the musicians and choristers have a rather depraved look, and go through their programme as mechanically as they afterwards offer you the dish for your contributory copper? The effect of the serenade need not therefore be spoiled for you.

But it is a city of beggars as well as beauty, and you are never more forcibly reminded of it than when you unfold your napkin and glance at the bill of fare. One after another they enter, and lay their case before you with outstretched palms. Some are deformed, others are wrecked by accidents, and yet others, one is prone to imagine, have been skilfully treated by specialists who can dress up a mendicant to compel compassion as an ordinary little girl attires her doll. But you will mark—or, at least, you may—that however ghastly their disfigurement, these beggars of Florence still keep their spirits sprightly within them. If you condole with them, no doubt they will whine plaintively, not to run counter to your humour and their own interests. But they would rather crack a small volatile joke with you; and if you give them a copper smiling, they will show much more gratitude than if you offer it with the ends of your mouth lowered to signify your heart's sympathy.

There's no getting out of their jurisdiction in Florence. Though you betake yourself to the secluded cloisters of Santa Croce, and there, amid the tombs and the daisies of the dark green grass, stroll up and down with the pleasant blue dome of the heavens overhead, and as you imagine far from distracting influences, you shall not long be left to your solitude. Some poor little cripple will espy you through the chinks of the church door, and after many laboured movements run you into a corner between a white marble tomb and the wall. Once trapped thus, there is no escape consistent with honour. The poor little cripple is sure to have a sweet voluble tongue, and his appeals in the name of the Virgin are not to be hearkened to with a deaf ear.

So, too, if you wander away into the sunny open space of the Cascine, where the fashionable world rides and drives in the fag-end of the afternoon. You may flatter yourself that you shall have your retreat to yourself at a time when the "beau monde" is still at home. So you sit in the shade and peep from some green arbour at the glittering river and the suspension bridge which spans it. There is a tennis

court hard by, "riservato:" in fact, a patch of English life imported into Florence. The players are English too; and you mildly marvel how it would be taken in London if we allowed a certain number of square yards of Hyde Park to be appropriated thus, by say a score of Frenchmen, for a national game or exercise of theirs. All is peace indeed, and the thrush in the tree above seems like to go sweetly mad in the energy of its melodious chanting.

The wise thrush; he sings each song twice over,
Lest you should think he never could recapture
The first fine careless rapture.

Here too, however, the gentle words, "For charity's sake, signore," somehow soon get whispered through the bushes; and here, too, a thin brown hand appears as a commentary upon the words. It is the smoke of your pipe which has this time betrayed you into the hands of your untiring pursuer.

Not that one minds this sort of thing, in Florence, in spring. In summer, with the gay exhilaration gone from the hot air, it would be different. Then it is quite enough effort to walk a quarter of a mile to the well-known library of Vieux-seux, at the corner of the street, or to crawl to one or other of the fashionable clubs or cafés in the Via Tornabuoni. Only at night does Florence then put on some of its old charms. With the star-spangled sky above—reflected in the gliding river—and the air rid of the furnace heat from the sun, one might, after dark, fancy it was spring—for the fascination's sake. To tell the truth, indeed, the summer night may even be pleasanter than the spring night. For with a strong breeze from the snow of the mountains, in April or May the evenings in Florence are sometimes a thought icy.

In one sense, to visit Florence in spring is not so much of a change as it might be to the travelling Briton. Wherever one turns one hears the English tongue—or the American, which is not quite the same thing. There's no need to practise that little stock of Italian which has been accumulated with such difficulty, and yet has a tendency to diminish so fast upon the least encouragement. Why, the beggars themselves prattle their words of English—picked up in the restaurants or at the porches of the hotels. Of course every waiter and tradesman who knows his business is eager to spare you the travail of talking in his own language—and to advance his knowledge of your language by forcing it upon you.

Besides, one is perpetually dropping upon people as familiar as the New Law Courts of Temple Bar. It is either among the flowers stacked by the pavement, or in Viennese's library, or in one's own hotel, or at a friend's house, a café, a picture gallery, or a theatre. The "who would have thought of seeing you here?" becomes a commonplace phrase for use in Florence in spring. This is especially so with our American cousins, who appear to have a surprising acquaintance with each other. It is nothing in objection that when at home they live as far apart as is San Francisco from Boston. They all seem to know each other, and to be on the most intimate terms with a multitude of mutual friends. Yet one is disposed to suspect that if they were to return to their own little continent by the same ship, most of them would have nothing more to say to each other—until they met again in Florence in spring.

This bustle and brightness is very agreeable for a few weeks; but towards the end of May, if not sooner, one is apt to yearn for a retreat of a different kind. Tourists are picturesque enough objects, especially some of those who come to Florence in spring, with extraordinarily cheap tour tickets from Germany, as members of a pilgrimage bound for the Vatican, or for the pleasures of honeymoon; yet even tourists become a weariness to the soul at length. In particular, one grows to loathe the set terms in which the "ciceroni" explain to the ignorant the "sights" they have come to see.

This is especially so in the picture galleries of the Pitti and the Uffizi. There are days when the influx of the "personally conducted" is so great that they carry the rest of the world along with them in their smart, business-like survey of the pictures in, say, an hour and a half. There is then no sentimental dallying before the gems of the Tribuna Chamber of the gallery. Most people spend their hours here; but with the "personally conducted" it is an affair of five minutes at the outside; and in their ardour to see in the five minutes all the various masterpieces of the great artists here collected, they dislodge from their vantage positions student after student without much pretence of apology. The guide, meanwhile, is fiendishly laconic: "'The Madonna del Cardinello,' by Raphael; 'Titian,' messieurs; this is by Guido Reni; the statue is the 'Venus de Medici.' And now, gentlemen, if you please, move

on to the next room!" The more fortunate, because less preoccupied, visitors to Florence look after these bustling, perspiring tourists with an expression in which contempt and pity have a very decided part.

There's no end to the social attractions of Florence at this time of the year. By day the blue sky smiles serenely upon the city, its domes, and towers, and gardens, and at night Lung' Arno sees not a little cheerful revelry. There are balls in the "pensioni" devoted to visitors, and balls in the "palazzi" which still bear great names. If you do not care for such superlative excitement as this, are there not convenient stone balconies to the windows of all the drawing-rooms which look upon the gliding river? The curtains to the windows are civilly thick, and you may be left undisturbed while you whisper tender words in the ear of the girl who has ensnared your heart, while you glance from each other to the long highway jewelled with lamps, the bridges also resplendent with many lights, and the bright stars above. Against one Florentine habit, however, at such a time one has the right to protest in all earnestness. There are wandering bands of minstrels then abroad in the roads—professionals and titled amateurs. If they espy you in your balcony, 'tis ten to one they will form a square beneath the window and twang their mandolines loudly in your honour and that of the fair lady who is with you. To the unexperienced this is apt to be trying, and, moreover, it brings interruption in its train; for straightway there is a rush from within to the balcony, and then your sweet solitude is destroyed.

The spring months introduce the sensation-loving Florentines to divers religious festivals which tend to enliven their lives. One after the other the churches celebrate the anniversaries of their patron saints. The masses in the morning are remarkable for the lavishness of the candles, and, perhaps, for the chorister or two borrowed for the occasion from the Papal choir, and in the evening the exterior of the church is hung with lamps from the base of its façade to the lofty point of its campanile—a spectacle much to the taste of the Florentines, who come to it in crowds with the unvarying adjective, "Bella!" upon their eager lips.

One gets used to this word in Florence. Everything in the city is "bella," from the heavens to the flower-girl who is so very

positive that the one thing needful to make your own attractiveness complete is the pale pink rosebud she insists on pinning to your coat. The speech of the Florentines is notoriously "bella." It is classic Italian, if classic Italian can be said nowadays to exist in the face of the demoralising influence of newspaper Italian. Some say that outside the Santa Croce gate is the only spot in the peninsula where you may still hear the Italian of Boccaccio. At any rate, Italian scholars make much of the peasants who here live by the city walls. Raineri, for example, during a ten years' residence in Florence, used to talk with them every day as regularly as he ate his dinner. Unfortunately for the foreigner who desires in like manner to improve his attainments, though the speech of these peasants may be delightfully pure and archaic, their pronunciation is not quite as clear as it might be. The "lingua Toscana" is there; but the "bocca Romana" by no means.

"Bella," too, in the judgement of the generous Florentines is the conduct of the many crowned and disrowned heads that come here in the spring of the year. Florence annually has a debauch of sovereignty. The people ask each other, when they see a magnificent equipage in the streets with an imposing personage within the carriage, "What King," or, "What Queen is that?" And they are as ready to lift their hats and bow smilingly as if the monarch in question were their own dearly beloved Humbert or Queen Margarita. Their photograph shops are full of the pictures of Kings and Queens. When Queen Victoria was at the Villa Palmieri, they gave her an ovation whenever they caught her in the streets; and at the railway station their vivas would have been reckoned loud in British throats. The titled world of Europe do well for Florence in visiting the city as they do and spending their money so freely.

Nowhere outside England does one hear so much entertaining gossip about our British celebrities as in Florence—in spring. It seems as if they all came to the fair city at one time or another. Some, as we know, make it a home. Their names are as familiar in Florentine houses as with us. People point at them from the cafés and clubs as they pass on foot or in their carriages, and tell the latest news about them. Some of this news is sad scandalous stuff. It could hardly be otherwise in a city that teems, like Florence, with gilded idle youths and unmarried ladies—middle-

aged and more—who find it vastly cheaper and more agreeable as a residence than any British watering-place. One must not be too credulous in Florence.

Unfortunately the spring does not last for ever, even in Florence. By-and-by, when May has well advanced, the words "comincia far caldo" ("it begins to grow warm") are in every one's mouth. It serves as a sort of expanded morning salutation, and the rosy heated faces of the interlocutors sufficiently suggest that there is truth in the words. The flower "feste" are over, and the last rose-leaf from the slaughter of so many innocent blossoms has been swept from the street-way by the energetic municipality. There is talk of green figs to supersede the dessert of tiny strawberries, which have for the past fortnight told of the coming summer. Ice comes to table now, as regularly as the mosquito, who has somehow got domiciled in your bedroom, begins to buzz just when you are falling asleep.

'Tis time to pack up and go. If the homeland is too far away, at least one may speed to Vallombrosa, or the coast. Anon, when the torrid days of July and August have died of inflammation, it may not be so very injudicious to think of returning to the heated city. But you would do more wisely to stay away until the winter, or until the first week of April brings spring into full fair birth again.

THE THIRTEENTH BRYDAIN.

By MARGARET MOULE.

Author of "Catherine Maidment's Burden," "Benefit of Clergy," "Mr. Wingrove's Ways," "The Vicar's Aunt," "Dick's Wife," etc.

CHAPTER XIX.

It was four o'clock in the morning, and Brydain had reached his rooms about an hour before, having, naturally, been almost the last person to leave the Kingstons' house.

He was sitting in an arm-chair near the ashes of what had been the fire of the day before, and the May morning light was stealing through the blinds and curtains, and making the light of the lamp on the table seem faint and ineffectual in its brightness.

Brydain, on coming in, had thrown himself straight into this chair, and had not moved since. He had never once thought of undressing or of going to bed.

He had spent the whole hour as, indeed, he had spent every instant of his walk home, every moment since he left Weymouth Street, in a sort of waking dream of intense, overpowering happiness.

His face was flushed with excitement; his eyes, fixed on a ray of daylight which was creeping in through a crack in the blinds, were unnaturally brilliant and eager. The ray of daylight advanced gradually, and Brydain was watching it mechanically as it crept along. He had not the least idea or conception of any one of his surroundings, though. He was not conscious of anything but one scene, which was so vividly before his eyes as to shut out any other consciousness whatever. Again and again he went through the little scene on the landing in which he had thanked Etenne for her singing; again and again he looked into those great grey eyes, and then saw them suddenly lowered before his look. With every repetition of the scene a thrill, such as he had never before felt, ran through all his veins, and he clasped the arms of his chair in intense emotion. He did not know why he went over it again and again; he had not reasoned with himself. He only lived it over and over again, each time with a more intense feeling of undefined excitement and happiness.

There is a curious nebulous background of thought and realisation, which is always present with us in our most acute and intense feeling of the detail of the moment, and serves, if it is a happy background, to intensify the happiness of that detail; if it is unhappy, to cloud it with indefinable greyness. That background, too, was happy for Brydain. All his life seemed to be full of promise for the future, and the excitement of success. He had been surrounded by congratulation; he had been flattered, complimented, made much of, every hour of that evening. Success was behind him — success before him; and sharply outlined against this background, as its central and crowning point, was Etenne Farrant's figure, her flushed face and downcast eyes.

The ray of light crept onwards along the wall, and Brydain's excited eyes still followed it with the abstracted consciousness of a man whose mind is far away. He was not defining his love for Etenne; neither definition nor detail had any place in his mind. He was simply absorbed in his happiness. He only wanted to go on dreaming and dreaming the same dream of her.

The cold daylight streak was now becoming flushed with the red light of the dawn, and it crept rather more quickly along the inches of wall before it. It was across the intervening wall now, and must shortly reach that above the mantelshef. Brydain, as he dimly realised its flush of colour, thought vaguely that it was, of course, a sunny morning. How could life be anything else but sunny? Grey days were a myth; their existence was an impossibility; nothing but sunshine could ever exist in so happy a world.

He threw his arms behind his head and leaned back in his chair. He was physically tired, though he had no consciousness of it; his mental life had completely killed all physical feeling. Never in all his twenty-six years of life had he lived so intensely as he was living now in these morning hours of the dawning day. He told himself that this was only the morning; he had a whole day's happiness before him, and days and days and countless days after that yet to come. It was a beautiful, a wonderful world, where so much happiness could come to its inhabitants!

The little clock—his father's little old clock—quavered out six strokes; and the ray of light, with Brydain's eyes still following it mechanically, crept onwards across the wall above the mantelshef. The clock hands—little, old-fashioned, short, gold hands—moved to the ten minutes past, the quarter past, and as they touched the half-hour and the little clock quavered out one stroke, the ray of light at the same moment touched the photograph in the middle of the wall—the photograph of the Great House of Brydain. As if the glass caught the light, the ray seemed as it touched it to break and spread and to light up the whole picture. And Brydain saw it. Quite slowly, as if it all came to them by degrees, his eyes, perfectly steady and fixed in their gaze, grew wide and deep; every particle of light died out of them until nothing was left but a fixed and glassy stare. From his face every vestige of colour faded, but as slowly as a receding tide, until even his lips were blanched. The outline of his face grew rigid; he did not utter one exclamation or move one inch. He simply stared fixedly at the photograph. In the cold red light every line of the Great House stood out as clearly as it could ever have done in reality; and with the growing power of the light, which was now almost broad sunlight, it grew more and

more distinct. Brydain did not move until the clock struck again—seven. Then he very slowly took his hands down from behind his head.

"It is true," he said, in an unnatural, harsh voice; "all true. I had forgotten it." The last four words came from him very slowly, with long pauses between each. He spoke them as a man who is crushed, and feels his very life going out of him under a blow, the power of which is so utterly out of proportion to his powers of resistance, that by their very disproportion they are paralysed. As his lips closed again after them, they seemed to take a still more rigid set than before, and his face was now perfectly white. Slowly, and as if with difficulty, he withdrew his eyes from the photograph, and rose stiffly and mechanically from his chair. He leaned both elbows on the mantelshelf and let his face fall into his hands with a heavy groan—a sound which was terrible in its expression of impotence and despair. And the same emotions were almost terribly expressed by his figure—his young figure standing in the weird mixed lights of the room, bent and motionless, with his fair head touched by the same ray of sunlight which had brought him recollection, misery, and despair. Suddenly, as if fascinated, and unable to keep them away, he lifted his head and let his eyes once more rest on the picture.

There it was; there was every outline, every window, every angle of the house in which had lived and died all those whom their doom had sent into silence. Mechanically his lips moved again, and mechanically he repeated the rhyme in which the Brydain villagers had, unnumbered years before he was born, embodied his doom:

For the thirteenth this doom shall wait,
He shall win the bride who brings his fate.

Over and over again he said the last line, his eyes still fixed on the picture. He was wholly unconscious that he spoke aloud—wholly unconscious of anything but the picture. He did not start at the opening of the door; he did not hear it; and he only moved round slowly to face her when his landlady said, in a quick, incisive voice:

"Mr. Brydain, sir, you've never been up all night! Are you ill, sir?"

"No," he said; "I am not ill. You can leave the room—I mean, you need not do anything to it," he added, as the

woman, with a rapid step, crossed the room and drew aside one of the curtains. "Leave it, please," he added, as she stared at him in blank surprise. Finally, seeing that he meant her to go, she, with another stare at his white face and unchanged evening dress, retreated and shut the door, resolving, in a heart that was very kind, that "the poor young fellow" was ill, and should have his breakfast sent up as soon as possible.

Brydain, meanwhile, turned away from the mantelshelf, and began a slow, heavy tramp up and down the room. The fascination of the picture seemed to have taken another and a reverse form. He turned every time he came near enough to have seen it, and walked sharply back. It was now as if he dared not look at it, and dared not, either, stop walking for a moment, lest he should be compelled to look at it. His walk was only interrupted by the entrance, at half-past eight o'clock, of the maid with his breakfast-tray. He seemed to have no energy to bid her take it away again. He simply stood still, at the opposite end of the room to the mantelshelf, gazing out of the window from which the landlady had drawn its curtain an hour before. The maid laid the cloth, placed everything on the table, and drew the curtains of the other window. Brydain did not hinder her; he seemed to be almost unaware of her presence; and the moment she, with a stare as long and as wondering as her mistress had given, had announced that his breakfast was ready, he turned, and, as she shut the door, began his walk again, without even a glance at the table.

"It's all over," he said to himself as he tramped to and fro; "all ended." An hour later he flung himself, at the unconscious promptings of physical weariness, heavily back into the chair in which he had sat all night; and there, perfectly motionless, with his hands over his eyes, to shut out any glimpses of the picture, and pressed hard down, as if by the pressure he was trying to shut out his mental consciousness of it, he sat until, soon after eleven, a quick knock came at the door of his room. He thought it was the maid to take away his untouched breakfast, and mechanically he answered, "Come in."

"I've come," said a cheery voice, "or rather, we have come," and Tiny Kingston, followed by Rachel, came quickly into the room. "We're taking you by surprise,

Keith," she began, lightly; then, breaking off suddenly: "Keith!" she said, "why, Keith, you haven't been to bed! What is the matter, Keith?"

"Are you ill, Keith?" said Rachel.

Brydain pulled himself together with a tremendous effort, and looked at his cousins. He had, half instinctively, risen at their entrance, but he had not looked at them before.

"You look very miserable, Keith," Rachel added, rather anxiously, as she saw his white, haggard face in a clear light.

"Ill?" he said. "No, I'm not ill, Rachel. I—I overslept myself, I believe," he said. "I sat down in this chair when I came in," he added, slowly, "and——"

"And we have just waked you up, you very lazy boy!" said Tiny, laughing.

"He has had no breakfast," said Rachel, whose quick eyes had scanned the table, and who seemed less willing than Tiny to take Brydain's account of himself.

"He will have, now we've waked him," laughed Tiny. "Keith," she went on, "you ought to be very grateful to us. I'm sure you never expected us to be up so early. I'll tell you what we came for. We are going to take the Manley girls to Bushey; we are going to spend the day and see the chestnuts, and we—mother wants you to give yourself a holiday and come too."

"It's an odd sort of thing to do—rather like Bank holiday people!" Rachel added, with a smile. "But the Manleys have never been there, so we thought it was a good opportunity to go ourselves. Father says the trees are a picture!"

The "Manley girls" were distant cousins of Mrs. Kingston, who lived in a somewhat remote Somersetshire village. They had arrived on a visit to Weymouth Street the evening before the party. During their visits to London "the Manley girls" invariably manifested an insatiable appetite for excitement of every description. Rachel and Tiny, who found expeditions to out-of-the-way sights "great fun," were very ready to gratify them.

"Do come," said Tiny, making a funny little imploring gesture. "You deserve a little play after last night. And we are going on to Kensington, to get Etrenne Farrant to come too," she added, with a sort of half tentative, half daring defiance.

She was not prepared for the way in which Brydain turned on her.

"Come too!" he cried; "come too!"

And then he laughed aloud—a hard, unnatural laugh.

The two looked at him, both more than half alarmed. Tiny thought he was still only half awaked. Rachel was sure he was ill.

"Do you mean you would rather not come?" she said gently.

"I cannot come," he said sharply—so very sharply that the two girls turned instantly to leave his room. Then he seemed to collect himself a little. "I—beg your pardon," he said, in a forced voice. "I am a little tired, I think. Please tell Aunt Elizabeth that she is very kind, but it is impossible."

They said good-bye very quickly, and Rachel went downstairs with the fixed intention of sending her father round to see Brydain immediately on her return.

CHAPTER XX.

THE two girls had hardly had time to drive out of Upper Baker Street in the hansom which had waited for them at the door of Brydain's rooms, when he himself, with a hasty stride, went into his bedroom, changed his evening dress in the space of a very few moments for his morning clothes, took his hat, and without a word or message of any kind as to when he should be in again, ran downstairs and went out of the front door of the house, banging it together behind him with a crash.

It was a lovely May morning—a May morning the beauty of which was so absolutely perfect as to make itself felt through all the dull, smoky atmosphere of the hot streets, and to show itself in the form of an unusual radiance on the face of every man, woman, and child who walked through them. The feeling that we carelessly call "susceptibility to climatic conditions" has as one of its constituents the instinctive love of beauty, which, however crowded out of sight, is inherent in some degree in every mortal mind.

Brydain at this moment, however, showed no signs of feeling of any sort as regards external conditions. His hat was pushed as low over his face as it was possible to wear it, and his eyes were fixed on the ground. He walked steadily and rapidly along, with a dogged determination in his walk that made more than one person whom he met turn round and wonder vaguely "if anything was wrong" with him. Towards Hampstead

he had turned his steps, and half an hour's hard walking brought him out on to a lonely part of the heath.

There was a bench close to him, and in a sudden physical reaction he flung himself down upon it and began to think. He had been holding thought off steadily all the time he walked. He knew, half instinctively, when he came out that he must think it all out and face it; but with every step he took and every foot of ground he traversed it had seemed to him less possible to think at all. His mind was an absolute whirl, wherein nothing would stay but the words of the old rhyme:

He shall win the bride who brings his fate.

That was the burden to which the branches of the budding ash-tree above him seemed to creak and sigh in perfect cadence. The south-west wind blew them about, and the words fitted themselves to their movements—especially the movement of one particular branch just before his eyes. After a few moments it seemed to him that it was no longer the motion of the tree that fitted the words; it was the tree which was saying the words—the tree, yes; and the air, the rustling grass at his feet—everything was saying them to him. He sprang up with a start; he was going out of his mind—he should assuredly go out of his mind if he did not think it out, and think it out quickly.

The facts were simple enough, he told himself. He had, with a mind full of other things, completely forgotten the immovable background of all his life; he had forgotten his fate.

He had lived so in the sunlight that he had completely forgotten the shadow. He had gone to meet his fate—gone deliberately towards it; and now he was face to face with the figure which was to bring it him, and the figure was that of the woman he loved and hoped to win—the woman without whom he could not live.

Suddenly Tredennis's words came back to him—the words spoken months ago, on the day when the Farrants' invitation to dinner had reached him; the last day on which spoken words had been between them on the subject. "Pull yourself together," Tredennis had said; "pull yourself together, and for the sake of your self-respect, deal it a strong blow."

Now was the moment when, if he only could "pull himself together" to do it, that strong blow must be dealt.

He had been walking up a slope of the heath during the last few moments. Now he sat down again, this time on a branch of a felled tree, and began to definitely face what must be faced before he could even prepare to deal that strong blow.

Did he believe it, or did he not? he asked himself in a sort of cold frenzy of realisation. Did he believe that by means of the wife he married he was to die? Did he believe that the deaths of every one of his twelve ancestors were the fulfilment of a fate which had hung over them years before they entered this life; or did he believe it all to be as Tredennis had expressed it, "the frenzied words of an untaught woman," and the twelve successive deaths to be so many coincidences? Which, in his inmost heart, did he believe? Over and over again he asked himself that question—now mentally, now half aloud—and with each reiteration the answer seemed further away and more impossible to reach. "I will not believe it! I do not believe it!" he cried at last. "I do not, I do not, I do not!"

And with the words he flung his whole spirit, figuratively speaking, against the grim wall of stony fate that seemed to hem in his life. It was as if he had said of a tangible obstacle, "It must go down before my force; I will break it down." But steady, firm, and unyielding as ever, that stony wall stood. Stronger than all his efforts, firmer than all his force, greater than all his reason, the fate of his life remained. He could not alter his conviction one hair's breadth. He grew white with the agony of the struggle he made to conquer—but he was conquered.

Then a new line of thought came to him. If he could not drive this belief in his fate from his mind and being, he could defy it. That thought, though not new to him, seemed to bring him, for the moment, comfort and relief. He got up from the fallen tree and walked rapidly on, not knowing where he went. Fortunately he was still in a lonely, unfrequented part of the heath, and there was no one near to see or wonder at his visible agitation.

He would defy it. He would walk towards it boldly, and, in the name of common sense, defy it. He would ask Etrenne Farrant to marry him, and the very strength of his love for her would make him able to defy it. By that strong love, armed with its force, he would defy it. Nothing could be so strong as his love for

Etrenne—nothing could stand before it; it must prevail. With a few quick, rapid steps he set out towards home, intending, before anything else could happen to change his mind and alter his power to do so, to write then and there to ask Etrenne to be his wife. He had not taken half-a-dozen steps, however, before he stopped short; his physical movement being checked, apparently, by the same power that checked his mental action. Defy it! He could not defy it; he dared not defy it! It was not to be defied, not to be touched, not to be averted by mortal will. It—whatever it was that held that destiny in its hand—would not stay its oncoming for anything so slight as his impotent defiance.

An alternative suggested itself to him at this moment, which, so contrary was it to all the former currents of his thoughts, was as if it had been suggested to him by another mind: "Give up all thought of Etrenne Farrant," it said; "give her up, live without her, and save your own life."

For one instant he hailed this as a last hope, then he flung it away as if it burnt his thoughts. "Live without her!" He could not. He loved her, he had learnt last night, madly, wildly, passionately; life without her was impossible to contemplate. Sooner than do that he would die here and now, cheerfully and readily.

And then the grim stony wall rose up before him again. He must walk towards it, but not to defy it. He should walk towards it and meet his fate.

He had walked on unheeding, and at this moment he found himself among houses and streets. He took out his watch and saw it was nearly five o'clock.

Across his mind, with this return to material objects, there floated a vague remembrance of an engagement of some sort or other for this evening. What it was he could not remember. But, half unconsciously, he turned towards home, in order to discover and to keep it. An hour later he stood in his room again, a card in his hand. The engagement was

an invitation to a dinner-party, at the house of some friends of Mr. Lennard's. Half dazed, Brydain began to dress for it slowly. It seemed to him, as far as he could remember through the thick veil of passionate thought and feeling that divided his then from his now, that Mr. Lennard had urged him to go; told him that the people were influential, and made him look on it as a duty. Under the vague pressure of this, he finished dressing and set out.

Arrived in the drawing-room, he found himself one in a crowd of persons, for it was a very large dinner-party—far larger than he had expected. He had been standing alone for some moments, after his greeting to his hostess, when his host came up to him and said:

"Will you take in Miss Farrant? I believe you know her—pretty dark girl over there?"

Brydain acquiesced, crossed the room, greeted Etrenne, took her in, sat by her side through dinner—all like a man who is a mere automaton, and whose real self is watching his own movements from afar. He was conscious that Etrenne talked to him, that he answered. He was aware that she asked him if he were ill, and he answered in the negative. The first words he spoke in full consciousness he spoke as she rose to leave his side at the end of dinner.

"May I speak to you presently?" he said.

When he came up to the drawing-room, and went up to where she sat, crimson, lovely, and agitated, she rose and followed him at his gesture into the long conservatory, which opened along the whole of one end of the room.

He led her to a chair. She sat down, and he leant against a very large azalea in a pot, that sheltered them both from any observation. He was very pale; his deep-set blue eyes were fixed and shining, and the narrow blue line between them was very visible against the pallor.

"Etrenne," he said, "I love you. Will you be my wife?"

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